

In 2014, Jamaica continued to face slow economic growth in the face of persistent corruption, a major deterrent to both domestic commercial activity and foreign investment. Gang and vigilante violence remains a major problem in the country, as do abusive police practices. In February, the government appointed a commission to review the violent confrontations that took place between civilians and security forces in 2010 in Tivoli Gardens, a Kingston neighborhood, that led to a state of emergency and dozens of casualties.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 34 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Jamaica's bicameral Parliament consists of the 63-member House of Representatives, elected for five years, and the 21-member Senate, with 13 senators appointed on the advice of the prime minister and 8 on the advice of the opposition leader. The leader of the party or coalition holding a majority in the House of Representatives is appointed as prime minister by the governor general, who represents the British monarch as head of state. The governor general is nominated by the prime minister and approved by the monarch.

In September 2011, Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) leader and prime minister Bruce Golding abruptly announced his resignation, a move widely interpreted to have stemmed from his involvement with alleged drug trafficker Christopher "Dudus" Coke, which had caused Golding to lose support within his own party and among the electorate. The following month, the JLP elected Minister of Education Andrew Holness to become Golding's successor as party leader and prime minister. Holness called for early general elections at the end of the year. On December 29, 2011, the People's National Party (PNP) captured 41 seats in Parliament, while the JLP took only 22. PNP chief Portia Simpson-Miller became prime minister in January 2012; she had previously held the position in 2006 and 2007.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Jamaica achieved independence from Britain in 1962. Since then, power has alternated between the social democratic PNP and the more conservative JLP. In the 2007 elections, the JLP's majority victory in the House of Representatives ended 18 years in power for the PNP. Although a vast number of smaller parties are active, politics at the national level is dominated by these two parties, and no other groups hold seats in the House of Representatives.

Powerful criminal gangs in some urban neighborhoods maintain influence over voter turnout in return for political favors, which has called into question the legitimacy of election results in those areas. None of the major political parties identify on religious, ethnic, or cultural grounds.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a serious problem in Jamaica. Long-standing relationships between elected representatives and organized crime, in which criminal gangs guaranteed votes in certain neighborhoods in exchange for protection, has been highlighted in recent years as the U.S. government pressed for the extradition of Coke, who was sentenced to 23 years in prison in 2012 following a lengthy investigative process. The gang Coke reputedly led, the Shower Posse, was based in Tivoli Gardens, an area of Kingston that Prime Minister Golding represented in the parliament. In September 2014, the minister of finance and planning called for the establishment of more robust anticorruption mechanisms, emphasizing that addressing corruption remains a national priority and is necessary for increasing public trust in government.

Government whistleblowers who object to official acts of waste, fraud, or abuse of power are not well protected by Jamaican law, as is required under the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. Implementation of the 2000 Corruption Prevention Act has been problematic. Opposition leaders have accused the government of connections to scams originating in Jamaica in which victims are told they have won the lottery, only to have their personal information stolen. The government has addressed the matter by amending a handful of laws, including the Evidence Act in 2012. Jamaica was ranked 85 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. An access to information law has been in effect in the country since 2004.

Civil Liberties: 40 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitutional right to free expression is generally respected. While newspapers are independent and free from government control, circulation is generally low. Broadcast media are largely state owned but are open to pluralistic points of view. Journalists occasionally face intimidation in the run-up to elections. No attacks against journalists were reported in 2014, though both media workers and outlets occasionally face threats from state and nonstate actors. The government does not restrict access to the internet and is not known to engage in unlawful online surveillance.

Freedom of religion is constitutionally protected and generally respected in practice. While laws banning Obeah—an Afro-Caribbean shamanistic religion—remain on the books, they are not actively enforced. The government does not generally hinder academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. In August, the JLP organized a demonstration in Kingston against fare hikes in the city's public transport. Hundreds demonstrated peacefully outside government buildings and were not disturbed by the police. Jamaica has a small but robust civil society and active community groups.

Approximately 20 percent of the workforce is unionized. Labor unions are politically influential and have the right to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judicial system is headed by the Supreme Court and includes a court of appeals and several magistrates' courts. The Trinidad-based Caribbean Court of Justice is the highest appellate court. A growing backlog of cases and a shortage of court staff at all levels continue to undermine the justice system.

Extrajudicial killings by police remain a major problem in Jamaica, accounting for 12 percent of murders each year, according to Amnesty International. While there were a large number of homicides by police in the first half of the year, the rate for all of 2014 was 100, considerably lower than the 258 registered in 2013; this was the first time that the annual number of homicides by police had fallen below 200 in more than a decade. Observers attributed the improvement to increasing accountability, as an independent commission began to more vigorously pursue cases of police violence in 2014. A high-profile case in August involved Mario Deane, a young man beaten to death after police admitted him to a cell with violent detainees. Three officers subsequently faced disciplinary action. Ill-treatment by prison guards has been reported, and conditions in detention centers and prisons are abysmal. Several new human rights projects have been initiated for the rehabilitation of prison inmates, to reduce impunity among the country's security forces, and to provide legal assistance to people who were not accorded their rights.

A Commission of Enquiry was finally appointed in February 2014 to provide an objective review of the state of emergency declared in 2010 in response to violence in Tivoli Gardens. At least 76 civilians were killed when police entered the neighborhood to arrest the drug-trafficking kingpin Coke and encountered armed resistance from his supporters. The commission began its work in December.

According to recent reports, children from abusive homes are routinely placed in police custody together with common criminals for periods of up to two weeks. Corporal punishment remained prevalent in many Jamaican schools in 2014.

Vigilante violence remains a common occurrence, as does gang activity, which has in recent years accounted for the majority of crimes in Jamaica. Kingston's insular "garrison" communities remain the epicenter of most violence and serve as safe havens for gangs. Jamaica is a transit point for cocaine shipped from Colombia to U.S. markets, and much of the island's violence is the result of warfare between drug gangs known as posses. Contributing factors include the deportation of Jamaican-born criminals from the United States and an illegal weapons trade. In March 2014, the Jamaican government passed antigang legislation that makes membership in such groups illegal and criminalizes certain gang-related activities, such as recruiting.

Harassment of and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains a major concern and is frequently ignored by the police. In 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that Jamaica is the most hostile environment in the Caribbean for LGBT people. Although Prime Minister Simpson-Miller indicated openness to the idea of appointing an LGBT cabinet minister, she did not do so in 2014. Furthermore, the government has not made attempts to repeal the country's anti-LGBT laws. Legislation against sodomy, which is punishable by 10 years in prison with hard labor, was challenged in court in 2014; however, the case was withdrawn in August after death threats were made against the claimant and his family.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Legal protections for women are poorly enforced, and violence and discrimination remain widespread. A

number of highly publicized rape cases of young girls have led to public protests and a renewed debate about prevention and punishment of the crime. Women are underrepresented in government, holding just seven seats in the House of Representatives.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)